Final report of the Visegrad Scholarship at OSA
Fellow: Virág MAJOR

Research period: 3rd of June – 3rd of July
Research topic: Archiving in the Archive: Art as a means of formulating public opinion

THE TOPIC
In the light of the development of my research during the research period in OSA I would change the title of my research to "Archives as a means of formulating public opinion", as the main focus of the research became the archive itself. After the initial week at OSA I have on the one hand realized that I am not finding documents I hoped for (artistic samizdat, documents and press of oppositional artistic practices), while on the other hand I have discovered that the OSA archive as an institution could well be interesting to study, for my interest in creating an archive of engaged contemporary artistic interventions in the current political situation in Hungary. Taking the notion of “active archive” from György Galántai, initiator of the artistic archive Artpool in the 70s, I was investigating into ways in which archives and the process of archiving can be active in creating alternative narratives, in activating a community of intellectuals to reconsider history and the present.

METHODOLOGY
My methodology was that of independent artistic research, with an open end, that is however pointing towards the archive mentioned above I intend to initiate:

Reading, listenin, researching
Talking and spending time with archiving people, recording (sound), writing (taking notes)
Re-reading, re-listening, understanding, drawing conclusions
... preparing future archive

I chose this methodology, as opposed to strict scientific research, as I am from the art field and believe that artistic research, with its more associative nature, can be a good complement for scientific research. I hoped it would open up possibilities for measuring the unmeasurable, talking not strictly scientific, "not having to qualify every statement, only in terms of veracity (…) making imaginative leaps that can be provocations for new pictures of the world" (Raqs Media Collective). My aim was to study, inquire, examine, scrutinize the topic carefully and see if the research itself activates and inspires me and the people involved to work on and possibly develop the concept for the archive. I was so to say interested to see the possibilities of activation through the research itself. Besides looking into archive theory in the OSA Library, in Artpool and on-line, my main research tool was making interviews with people working with archives. Through the interviews I was looking for answers to my main research questions, but I left them open and flexible, to get the subjective perspective of each person interviewed the best.

THE RESEARCHED SUBJECT MATERIAL
In order to better understand the importance and meaning of the context to an archive I chose to investigate archives along three main axis: (1)TIME (relevance to past/present/future) and (2)POLITICAL-HISTORICAL CONTEXT (east/west, centrum/periphery, democratic vs. totalitarian or post-totalitarian state, or condition of democratic deficit) and (3)STRUCTURAL NATURE (institutional/artistic, strategies of collection). I looked at both conventional and artistic archives, contemporary artistic archival practices and archives born under totalitarian rule.

My research focused mostly on OSA and Artpool, two highly different contemporary archives in Budapest, but also included East Art Map, FreeDoc (a documentary artistic archival project), Liget30 (a recent archival exhibition in Budapest), the projects RePO history (1989-2000) and Political Art Documentation and Distribution (1980-88), public and political art projects engaging with archiving, memory, activist art in New York, Political Practices of Post-Yugoslav Art Retrospective (a partly

exhibition curated by Jelena Vesic, Belgrade, Serbia), the Interarchive project by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Archive as Strategy ongoing project (Calvert 22 Foundation, London), as well as the works of contemporary artists using new artistic archival practices, such as Walid Raad, Tacita Dean, Sam Durant, Susan Hiller, as well as the active archive project from dOCUMENTA (13) Considering Seed Sovereignty.

I interviewed from the OSA archive András Mink (Research Archivist), Csaba Szilágyi (Head of the Human Rights Program), Miklós Tamási (Creative Program Officer), Oksana Sariskova (Junior Research Fellow) and Anikó Kövecsi (Audio-visual Archivist), György Galántai from Artpool, about the project East Art Map János Sugár (artist, teacher at MKE), Nóra Feigl and Zsófia Bene, curators of Liget30 exhibition, Gabriella Csoszó (artist of Freedoc), of the Occupy LUMU initiative artists Szabolcs KissPál, Csaba Nemes, György Orbán, Balázs Horváth (Byron).

POINTS OF DEPARTURE, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My points of departure correspond to the three main axis of my research.

(1) Being interested in initiating an archive that is not only guarding documents for the consideration of future generations, but is actively engaging with the present in this important historic time in Hungary, I investigated through my research if and how archives can be active. To this interest I initially took two concepts under scrutiny in relation to the investigated projects and through my interviews. Firstly, Michel Foucault’s point of view, according to which it is impossible to describe our own archive, as it is from within these rules that we speak, and we would need the greatest chronological distance to be able to analyze it. Therefore, if we want to describe our archive, we need to depart from what we are saying and understand what we are yet unable to say, to distance ourselves from our own discourses. In this sense it is valid for our diagnosis. Secondly, Sven Spieker’s observations on contemporary artistic archival practice, which “retools, rethinks and revisits the archival practice of the 1920s. It focuses not on the past, but present ways of doing, it is a laboratory of meaning and uses. It uses the archive as a deliberately reactionary and outmoded medium, in order to reach a new documentary modalism, reconsidering the relation between art and politics.”

(2) If we think about archives, we have to think about history, what is it, how is it produced, what we learn from it, as archives are the ‘institutions of memory’ creators and re-creators of history itself. The historical time in which an archive is made is very important to how and why it preserves history. Concerning the relevance and importance of the historical-political context to an archive, I found the concept of Suely Rolnik rather interesting and worth investigating. According to her, artistic archives under totalitarian rule are estranged, seek micropolitical affect, their poetics is interrupted by the oppression. Contemporary artistic archives seek macropolitical effect, their poetics is interrupted by the art market.

(3) Concerning the form and collection strategy of the archive, I took as a point of departure Walter Benjamin’s Archive, whose “concept of the archive defers from that of the institutionalized archives (...) Order, efficiency, completeness and objectivity are the principles of archival work. In contrast to this, Benjamin’s archives reveal the passions of the collector. (...) Benjamin’s archives consist of images, texts, signs, things that one can see and touch, but they are also reservoir of experiences, ideas, and hopes, all of which have been inventoried and analyzed by their stock taker. Benjamin designates the true passion of the collector as “anarchistic, destructive.”

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2 Foucault, Michel: A tudás archeológiája, Atlantisz, Bp. 2001 / A történeti a priori és az archívum
3 Sven Spieker: Un-Knowing, Getting Lost, Linking Points in Space: The New Archival Practice
5 Suely Rolnik: Archive Mania, from series dOCUMENTA (13): 100 Thoughts – 100 Notes, Hatje Cantz, 2011
6 Walter Benjamin’s Archive : images, texts, signs,[Ursula Marx], Verso, London, New York, 2007, p1-4
FINDINGS

The first thing that became clear to me while doing my research and interviews was that the basic concepts of my research (archive, history, activation, intervention) are highly overloaded with meanings different to the different fields of knowledge. As I was talking to historians, archivists, artists, curators, people using different discourses and language, I got many interesting and much deferring inputs from my interviewees.

Starting at the basics: what is for instance an archive for an artist, is only a chaotic collection for an archivist, definitely not an archive to be taken seriously. This made my proposal of considering both institutional and artistic archives, or let’s say anarchistic collections of facts and artifacts and conventional institutional archives, and naming them both archives difficult to understand for historians and archivists. As Oksana Sariskova put it, archives are primarily very conservative institutions that, despite since Foucault the objectivity of an archive cannot be a serious question, are still working according to strict rules and criteria of collecting and indexing, stressing the importance of making their resources searchable and available for the public. From this point of view, artistic archives are of course not serious enough. At the same time, from a critical artistic point of view, archives are highly questionable institutions, and are interesting exactly because of their outmodedness, their questionable way of creating historical narratives, their often presupposed, but never fulfilled completeness and objectivity. In my point of view, artistic work with archives added a lot to archival theory, bringing an approach in many respects better corresponding to human thinking and memory, which is always subjective, context-bounded and associative. As Eric Ketelaar put it, “archival researchers and archivists are exploring the multiplication of perspectives. They are learning (or relearning) from anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, cultural and literary theorists: to look up from the record and through the record, looking beyond – and questioning – its boundaries. In new perspectives seeing with the archive (to use Tom Nesmith’s magnificent expression), trying to read its tacit narratives of power and knowledge.” However, the question if and how artistic archives can provide an alternative for institutional archives remains open, and is very much dependent on the socio-political context, but I will come back to this. In artistic archives a very conscious work with the concept of the archive can be observed, but often they are not archives even in the widest sense, they only use the archive concept as a strategic tool. At times artistic archives are mere self-archives born from the changes of the nature of art, at times more or less conscious and reflected efforts of self-historicisation, sometimes even in a misguided sense driven by the artists’ ego and the art market rules. Relating to my third question concerning the collection strategy of the proposed archive, I would conclude that it should be somewhere between the conventional archive and an artistic one, as both approaches have a lot to learn from each other.

The question of the collection strategy brings us straight to the time dimension of the archive, as it highly depends on what the archive is aiming at: thinking about and re-thinking the past, working with the present or considering the future generations that will hopefully access and use the collection. Concerning this I met many different approaches during my research, although most people agreed that an active engagement of an archive with the present is possible and desirable in many sense. There were however voices for that an archive can only focus on consequently collecting material for future generations. What is certainly very difficult, as Foucault also stated it, is to understand and describe the archive of the present. According to György Galántai, borrowing the expression from Miklós Erdély, in this respect we can only have a “hunch”, we can never understand or know. As János Sugár noted, art history also underlines this, with its rich history of great artist who were poor and unrecognized in their own time. All in all, past, present and future cannot be so easily separated, as Bart de Baere puts it “archives are the presenters of a possible image in which the past, present and future are a continuum.” The past and its memory often haunts the present, past historical traumas are often hurtful and actual in the present: this is what

the historical exhibitions of OSA and the reactions to them are also showing. Our archives and our histories should best be from time to time reconsidered and reappropriated, which is an active task that an archive can perform in the present. The examples of Radio Free Europe, OSA, Artpool, Liget30, East Art Map show that through calls, initiating projects and new collections, a collection strategy, activating documents from the archive and other engaged projects the archives can also generate new knowledge in the present. Knowledge that would not have appeared without the activity of the archive, that is relevant to and used in the present. By creating an active mental space archives can be tools for intellectual work and provide the possibility for active engagement. This is also what György Galántai meant by his “active archive” concept.

Coming to my second point, thinking about archives history will always be a central question, as they are one of those institutions, where history is forged. However, they are not simple institutions, but authorities, with a power nature. Jacques Derrida argues that “[T]here is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory” According to Eric Ketelaar archivalisation is “the conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving”. This power position (that I have not really considered before, when I thought about making an archive of engaged artistic interventions in the present situation in Hungary) is very important and is a great responsibility. Working with and recreating history is often what archives explicitly do. The East Art Map project worked very consciously on this, with its motto “History is not given, please help us to construct is”, thus launching a self-historicisation process for Eastern European art. OSA uses its power status as an archive to challenge historical interpretations and narratives, through its historical exhibition for instance. The project REPOHistory’s aim was also to dig up and present hidden historical narratives, revealing social problems and uncomfortable stories long forgotten or never canonized. The exhibition Political Practices of Post-Yugoslav Art: Retrospective 01 showed a radical approach to history, a critical approach to historicization by presenting historical narratives and naming the canon. The extent to which and how institutional archives or artists take part in writing history largely depends on the historical-political context. As Derrida put it, “effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation”. However, it is not the democratic state, where archives flourish. According to Miklós Tamási, totalitarian regimes, as a result of their paranoid effort to control and document everything, tend to favor archiving. They are also a context, where artistic archives flourish, as an effort of artists who are outside of the officially accepted canon create their parallel narratives, hoping that when censorship and oppression ends they can reconstitute the historical loss. This can be observed in Hungary as well, if Artpool would not have archived the activities of the avant-garde, there would not have been much left of them, as this small subculture was completely invisible for the larger society. However, totalitarian regimes in their last days often make an attempt to destroy documents that are compromising for them, and could for instance be dug up later to bring the people in power to court for violation of the law or human rights. The present historical context in Hungary is also interesting in terms of archiving, as by abolishing the imperative of transparency, the government brought about an era, where no background information to political decisions will be there to be found for the future generations. The historical context does produce different artistic archival projects, if we compare Artpool to Occupy LUMU or Freedoc, we will see the statement of Suely Rolnik affirmed.

As archives were mostly a new topic for me, new perspectives and problematics to be taken into consideration naturally appeared during my research, bringing more and more questions with them. Such were the already mentioned power position of the archive, and related to it the question of selection. If one makes an archive for instance on contemporary engaged artistic practices in Hungary, it will have to be decided what will be included and what not, which in a way is a decision about what is contemporary engaged practice and what not, legitimizing some and excluding other –

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9 The Archive [Charles Merewether], Whitechapel Gallery, 2006, p 76-79
11 The Archive [Charles Merewether], Whitechapel Gallery, 2006, p 76-79
a shaky territory, considering the shakiness of such judgements in art history. Another question that came up was that of technology: digitalization of the archives, internet as an archive, how changes in technology affect what and how is documented, and provides an additional opportunity for involvement in and activation of the archive. Interestingly, the only reference I found for “active archive” besides the concept of György Galántai, was a project thinking about how to engage users of the archive with the help of technology.

AN ACTIVE ARCHIVE
Archives can be active in many different ways, such as by making calls for collecting documents (OSA – Archive of Electronic Campaign Letters, People’s Archive of Sinking and Melting), by initiating projects and new collections that seem timely at a given historical time (Liget30, Artpool), by activating documents from the archive, either in an exhibition, (OSA – Galeria Centralis), or other events, by promoting research in the archive (OSA – Visegrad Scholarship) or more significantly digging up documents in order to bring violators of human rights to court (practice of National Security Archive), by challenging historical narratives and canons (PPYUArt, REPOHistory), by engaging in a dialogue with the users through technological innovation (Considering Seed Sovereignty), producing and making documents (or images) accessible (Freedoc, Fortepan), reproducing missing historical narratives, self-historicisation (East Art Map).

To make an archive actively engaging with artistic reflections on the present political situation in Hungary is, according to the people questioned a worthwhile proposal. We talked with Szabad Művészek (Free Artists) about the possibility of developing such an archive together, with no concrete results yet. For me at the moment such a project would be twofold interesting. For one, it could provide a possibility for looking at and reconsidering the practices in this respect, which is unfortunately a largely undiscussed territory in contemporary art. Essential is that the collection be a collective process through active engagement (through a call) and not exclusive, providing an opportunity for healing and not producing new complexes within the already divided art community, according to János Sugár suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder. It should be an agent not of division, but a platform for discussion and forming new networks. It would be a platform that Bart De Baere imagined, as a space not turning towards the past, not closed, but a space stimulating thinking, communication and participation, that aims at helping the information getting back to society, and promoting the participation of the individual excluded from the political sphere. Secondly, it would provide for a common documentation of artistic products that are only individually and sporadically documented by the artists themselves, as the state or official institutional background for documenting and archiving artistic practices has disappeared – or never even was there.

The research fellowship at OSA gave me the unique opportunity to research freely and deeply into a field of interest, an opportunity that I normally do not have in my usual working practice: for this I am very grateful.

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RESEARCHED DOCUMENTS

OSA

EXHIBITIONS IN GALERIA CENTRALIS:

EXHIBITIONS DEALING WITH ARCHIVE-LIBRARY-RESEARCH PROBLEMATICS

Archives of the Living and the Dead – honoring Calolus Linnaeus


István Rév: The Archives of Metaphors
The earthworm as archivist


Dead Library – Books Unread

http://w3.osaarchivum.org/galeria/catalogue/2012/dead-library/index.html

Aby Warburg – The Mnemosyne Atlas

http://w3.osaarchivum.org/galeria/catalogue/2008/warburg/index.html

POLITICALLY CHARGED EXHIBITIONS

- EXHIBITIONS DEALING WITH HISTORICAL EVENTS STILL RELEVANT IN HUNGARY

Restoration – Northern Transylvania


Don – A Tragedy and its Afterlives

http://w3.osaarchivum.org/galeria/catalogue/2013/don/index.html

- EXHIBITIONS BASED ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

Srebrenica - Exhumation
The visitors were activated in the exhibition, and they themselves activated the exhibition through the research room, where documents of Srebrenica were exhibited.


The Divide


http://w3.osaarchivum.org/galeria/the_divide/

ACTIVATING DOCUMENTS OF THE ARCHIVE

- OSATV (Archív anyagok feldolgozása)


- Diafilm night (propaganda dia films for adults for socialist regime)linked to the launching of the online collection of dia film strips

http://www.osaarchivum.org/greenfield/search/*/relation_collectionName_facet:Hungarian%20Propaganda%20Filmstrips%22?sort=item_referenceNumber_sort%20asc&qf=

- 2012. December: Call for young artists to present works (re)using the materials of the archive

PROJECTS – COLLECTIONS INITIATED BY OSA

- FORTEPAN – initiative of Miklós Tamási, his personal collection, not in institutional frames, sheds light on the problem of publishing and collecting still and moving pictures (copyright issues)

http://www.fortepan.hu/?view=all&lang=en

- Documenting the last days of regimes (Iraqian TV)

- Email Archive of Civil Circles http://fa.osaarchivum.org/pki

- Archive of Electronic Campaign Letters http://www.kampanyarchivum.hu/

- Digitális Állambiztonsági Archívum

EXAMPLES OF OTHER ENGAGED (ACTIVE) PROGRAMS

- Engagement on the street: 2009 – projection on the street on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Romanian Revolution
- Engagement through public programs: 2013. Museum Night – critical molinos presented with quoted from representatives of the government, shading light on the nature of the present cultural policy
- Engaging with the digitalized world: Raoul Wallenberg in Second Life (2007)
- Giving space for non-conventional archives and other projects (mottos of civil movements from last 3 years – exhibition planned for 2014. January, taking Ádám Csillag’s oeuvre (videodocumenting protests) in to OSA
- Documentary Film Festival – archive goes outside (to cinemas in Budapest), the material from the festival comes after to the archive
- Visegrad Fellowship – activating the archive through research

ARTPOOL

- The webpage http://www.artpool.hu/ and the archive itself
- AL (Actual Letters, Art Samizdat newspapers 1983-85)
- Interview with György Galántai

EAST ART MAP

- The webpage http://www.eastartmap.org/
- Interview with János Sugár
- Schrödinger’s cat in the art world (by János Sugár) http://www.eastartmap.org/text/knowledge/selectors/sugar.pdf

LIGET30

- The exhibition live
- Catalogue of the exhibition (2013)
- Interview with curators Nóra Feigl and Zsófia Bene

Political Art Documentation and Distribution (PAD/D) and REPOHistory


FreeDoc (documentary-activist art project by Gabriella Csoszó)

- http://freedoc-gabriellacsoszo.blogspot.hu/
- Interview with the artist

Political Practices of Post-Yugoslav Art: Retrospective 01 (exhibition curated by Jelena Vesic, Belgrade, Serbia, 2009)
- The website: [http://pp-yu-art.net/en](http://pp-yu-art.net/en)
- Letter interview with Radmilla Joksimovic, curatorial assistant of the exhibition

**INTERARCHIVE**
- Interarchive. Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Field of Art


**Active Archive projects of dOCUMENTA (13)**
- [http://activearchives.org/wiki/Erkki_Kurenniemi:_In_2048](http://activearchives.org/wiki/Erkki_Kurenniemi:_In_2048)
- [http://activearchives.org/seed/seed-sovereignty/](http://activearchives.org/seed/seed-sovereignty/)
Projects of artists Walid Raad, Rabih Mroué, Zaatari Akram, Tacita Dean, Sam Durant, Susan Hiller for dOCUMENTA (13)

**People's Archive of Sinking and Melting**
- [http://www.sinkingandmelting.org/](http://www.sinkingandmelting.org/)

**GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Walter Benjamin’s Archive : images, texts, signs,**[Ursula Marx], Verso, London, New York, 2007


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Derrida, Jacques: *Az archívum kínzó vágya*, Budapest: Kijárat, 2008 (részlet: 11-16)


The Archive [Charles Merewether], Whitechapel Gallery, 2006


Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, Tere Vandén: *Artistic Research – theories, methods and practices*, Academy of Fine Am, Helsinki, Finland and University of Gothenburg I ArrMonitor, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2005

Suely Rolnik: Archive Mania, from series dOCUMENTA (13): 100 Thoughts – 100 Notes, Hatje Cantz, 2011

http://activearchives.org/
/ Manifesto for an active archive http://activearchives.org/wiki/Manifesto_for_an_Active_Archive
/ Discussing Seed Sovereignty http://activearchives.org/seed/seed-sovereignty/
/ Erkki Kurenniemi in 2048 http://activearchives.org/wiki/Erkki_Kurenniemi:_In_2048

Archive as Strategy: Conversations about Self-historicisation Across the East (Calvert 22 Foundation)
A project reflecting on archives in relation to that the notion of agency, strategies of re-imagining
history, strategic usage of the archives, archives talking back.
http://www.archiveasstrategy.org/

ARTISTS AND ARCHIVES – A PACIFIC STANDARD TIME SYMPOSIUM
Un-Knowing, Getting Lost, Linking Points in Space: The New Archival Practice
Sven Spieker, University of California, Santa Barbara
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVKTtyr6dBk
Artist Presentations George Herms, Suzanne Lacy, and Mario Garcia Torres
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y33dulvU7JQ
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o21O2ikkBIA